A new approach to culturally sensitive PTSD research in Zurich: Inspired by contributions from Carl Gustav Jung

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Abstract: This paper describes the development of a new research project on trauma and posttraumatic growth with a (cross-) cultural psychology focus. Leaving quantitative psychology behind and moving toward a metaphor-analytic methodology presents new opportunities and risks. We are aware that quantitative methodologies and case descriptions are highly prevalent and useful in psychology and related disciplines such as global mental health, social work and mental health nursing. For instance, quantitative psychology has developed elaborate methods for effectively measuring invariance across cultures (Milfont Fischer, 2010). However, we believe that additional perspectives from anthropology and ethnology—or the thoughts and principles developed by C. G. Jung—must be considered to adequately comprehend the as yet uncharted experiences of individuals in other cultures and of those individuals arriving in Europe from other cultures if we are to live together in dignity.

A New Approach to Culturally Sensitive PTSD Research in Zurich – Inspired by Contributions from Carl Gustav Jung

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During the past three decades, scientific knowledge of the mental consequences of traumatic experiences and intervention methods to address these consequences has rapidly increased. Based on this scientific knowledge, the World Health Organization (WHO) has begun to implement a variety of programs and initiatives for trauma survivors and trauma-stricken communities worldwide (e.g., Tol et al., 2014; Tol et al., 2011). In this context, the recent and planned new versions of the primary diagnostic classification systems—the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders version 5 (DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)—have both incorporated explicit sections about the culture-related aspects of all major conditions, including stress- and trauma-related disorders (First, Reed, Hyman, & Saxena, 2015; Lewis-Fernandez et al., 2014). However, the recent massive migration and refugee movements toward Europe have made it apparent that mental reactions in the aftermath of traumatic events throughout the world go beyond the current western concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This paper outlines new approaches to culturally sensitive PTSD research implemented at our Stress-response Syndromes Lab at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, and describes the historical contributions of the Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung that are relevant to this work.

The Zurich Cultural Psychology Approach to Extreme Stress Research

Our research group in Zurich—and previously in Dresden, Germany—is one of the many laboratories worldwide that investigates the development and maintenance of PTSD and treatment methods for trauma-related disorders (e.g., Maercker, Schützwohl, & Solomon, 1999; Wagner & Maercker, 2010a; Wang, Wang, & Maercker, 2013). There have been two primary reasons for our recent emerging interest in cultural psychology in the field of traumatic stress. First, based on relevant theory and studies of particular survivors' groups (victims of political persecution and imprisonment, crime victims and others) we developed a social-interpersonal framework model of PTSD (Maercker & Horn, 2013, Maercker & Hecker, 2016). This model is conceptualized in terms of an "onion skin." The outermost layer of this onion-skin model consists of culture and society. Cultural and historical factors had been already previously included in our lab's research since some of the traumas studied concerned traumatic stress that happened in former East-Germany in World War II or the subsequent communist dictatorship of that part of Germany that ended in 1989. All theoretical processes described in this model are reciprocal, i.e., individually-experienced traumatic stress affects culture and society, and, vice-versa, culture and society affect the suffering individual as described in more details below.

Second reason for our in interest in cultural psychology was related to the appointment of the first author of this paper in 2011to chair the working group on stress- and trauma-related disorders for the current ICD revision by the WHO. This working group consists of ten international experts from all continents who jointly developed and co-authored new guidelines for PTSD, complex PTSD, prolonged grief disorder and adjustment disorder that are thought to be applicable throughout the world (Maercker et al., 2013). The new diagnostic guidelines were widely accepted when they were presented at international conferences of psychiatry and psychology (i.e., the 30th International Conference of Psychology [ICP] in Cape Town in 2012 and the 31st ICP in Yokohama in 2016). However, some of the issues that the work group members raised concerning cultural aspects have not been incorporated into the new ICD-11 guidelines for PTSD, e.g., continuous traumatic stress (Stevens, Eagle, Kaminer, & Higson-Smith, 2013) and historical or collective trauma (Somasundaram, 2014). The working group decided that the empirical background research on these concepts is currently too sparse.

To contribute to cultural psychology in this area, our research on the socio-interpersonal model was designed to look more closely at the reciprocal processes between society at large and the individual. To achieve this aim, an overarching model that grasps the concept of 'culture' was needed, as was a meaningful, cross-culturally validated survey or questionnaire that could be used to operationalize the model. The traditional, dualistic view of individualism vs. collectivism (Hui & Triandis, 1986), aside from being somewhat outdated, does not capture the multifacetedness of culture that is required of a socio-interpersonal model of stress-related disorders. By contrast, the theory of personal value orientations proposed by Schwartz and Bilsky (1990) seemed more promising. According to this theory, cultures or societies can be described in terms of the relative importance given to ten value orientations that are assumed to be universal (e.g., power or benevolence). In this sense, the Schwartz value theory (Schwartz, 1992, 1994) offers a conceptual framework that allows conducting research that can, methodologically, be placed between emic descriptions of cultural phenomena and etic assumptions of universal processes in the development and maintenance of stress- and trauma-related disorders. For this reason, our research group started conducting research on the relationship between values and mental health. The reasoning behind this approach was the assumption that if culture can be operationalized through the Schwartz values, relationships between values and mental health would shed light

on possible relationships between culture and mental health.

Indeed, personal value orientations were shown to be related to PTSD in German and Chinese crime victims (Maercker et al., 2009). Based on this initial evidence, our research group continued using the Schwartz value theory for clinical psychology research. In a large study that included student samples from Germany, Russia and China, personal value orientations were related to mental health and well-being (mediated through two different variables): Benevolence and conformity predicted social support, whereas self-direction predicted resilience; both social support and self-direction were associated with a higher mental well-being and lower depression. Moreover, hedonism was directly associated with mental well-being (Maercker et al., 2015). Encouraged by this evidence, our research group will continue its investigation of the relationship between the Schwartz value theory and the consequences of stress- and trauma-related disorders.

Understanding how culture and society influence an individual's reactions to stressful events (and vice versa) is important, not least for designing meaningful and effective interventions. Despite the immense effort by the WHO to address stress- and trauma-related disorders, a large proportion of the people affected by these disorders do not have access to treatment. Internet-based interventions have the potential to reach populations that otherwise would not have access to treatment (Arjadi, Nauta, Chowdhary, & Bockting, 2015). To address these gaps, our research group in Zurich started early in designing such internet-based interventions for individual treatment of stress- and trauma-related disorders (Knaevelsrud & Maercker, 2007; Wagner, Knaevelsrud, & Maercker, 2006). For an intervention in China, however, the primary intervention focus was changed from intrapersonal processing to a social support-seeking rationale because interpersonal embedding plays a much more important role in Chinese culture (Wang et al., 2013). In general, when transferring interventions designed in western countries to other cultures, culturally sensitive adaptations are required to ensure that the intervention is meaningful (Bernal & Sáez-Santiago, 2006). A recent systematic review and meta-analysis of self-help or minimally guided interventions (i.e., Internet-based treatment or bibliography), co-authored by our research group, found that the more an intervention is culturally adapted, the higher its effectiveness (Harper, Heim, Maercker, & Albanese, 2016). The mental health intervention programs developed by the WHO have increasingly implemented this fundamental insight, e.g., a low threshold intervention for common mental health problems ("problem management plus": PM+; Dawson et al., 2015).

A Fresh Look at the PTSD Concept from Metaphor Research

The opportunity to work with trauma survivors and experts from all over the world raised an even more general question: Is the concept of 'trauma' culturally neutral or does it involve presuppositions? We came to the conclusion that it involves cultural presuppositions that guide the common attitudes, ways of communicating and practices of all persons who are concerned with the issue (e.g., professionals, patients, and relatives) in other cultures. Adversity-affected people often regard themselves as having been damaged by external sources and consider the 'trauma' as a sort of a break in their lifelines. The majority of researchers regard 'trauma' (i.e., the extreme adverse event or events) as the cause of a memory distortion that is commonly referred to as 'PTSD.' The media and the public increasingly recognize 'traumatized' persons as people with invisible 'scars.' Such 'scars' gained through traumatic events are not visible, but they are considered to be as important as physical scars.

The underlying basis of all these views is presumably the implicit analogy of 'trauma' and 'wound,' as the loanword from Greek is correctly translated. People who have difficulties in overcoming traumatic experiences or who show PTSD symptoms are considered to be 'wounded'; they have a 'wound' or (later on) a 'scar' that is analogous to a physical injury. In this sense, the Greek term 'trauma' became an extremely powerful metaphor and, consequently, gave birth to a variety of conceptual assumptions used both by professionals and lay persons. However, is this 'wound' analogy the only concept or metaphor from around the world that is used when describing the psychological aftermath of extreme stress? Metaphor research defines a metaphor as 'thinking of one thing in terms of another' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). If the 'wound' is a body-related or physical analogy, questions arise regarding whether other analogies exist that provide different metaphors or concepts of extreme stress.

Reports from psychological emergency aides and evidence from medical anthropology and similar disciplines have repeatedly indicated that a broad range of concepts or metaphors exist in cultures outside Europe and North America that describe comparable states of catastrophic experience. In the following section, three concepts or metaphors will be introduced: *nervios, noro* and *musiba.*

Nervios (translated: nerves) is an example of a metaphor with a physical source domain. It is a psychological concept that appears in Latino populations in the Americas, with some variations such as *ataque de nervios, nevra* or *nervos* (Baer et al., 2003; Guarnaccia, Lewis-Fernández, & Marano, 2003). The anthropologist Migliore (1993) has argued that the concept of nervios is related to an image such as 'I'm trembling like a stalk of wheat', which expresses the acquired instability of the entire person.

Noro, originally translated in current Sierra Leone (West Africa) as spiritual contamination, can also be translated as 'bad luck' (Stark, 2006). Thus, it primarily refers to the supernatural or spiritual realm. According to Stark (2006), only cleaning rituals can eventually dispel this bad luck; this concept was described by one girl: "Key to my healing was the washing in the stream. I could feel the bad luck leaving me… My luck has improved" (Stark, 2006, p. 215).

Musiba derives from the Arabic word *asaba*, and its use in everyday language has been described in Palestine (Afana, Pedersen, Rønsbo, & Kirmayer, 2010). *Musiba* is related to a religious context and means a test (by Allah) of the ability to endure hardship through patience. Through this

test, survivors will prove that their religious beliefs are true and the survivors will eventually be raised to a higher level of personal development. Thus, *musiba* places the trauma survivor in a religious and socio-moral realm that is incompatible with individualized complaints and breakdowns.

Trauma, *nervios, noro* and *musiba* each relate to different types of change to the personal and interpersonal states in the aftermath of traumatic events. From the short description above, one might guess how different the social and behavioral consequences of these concepts or metaphors are across cultures. Previous research has already identified emic (i.e., culture-immanent) concepts such as these in relation to emergency settings (Rasmussen, Keatley, & Joscelyne, 2014). Our research group at the University of Zurich is using the existing scientific evidence of a plurality of trauma-related concepts as the basis for a new research agenda that aims to describe, in a culturally sensitive manner, the psychological consequences of long-lasting extreme stressors and existential threats. This agenda adopts a metaphor-analytic methodology to investigate expressions of suffering and overcoming catastrophic experiences that in western culture are called 'traumatic' or leading to 'posttraumatic stress disorder.' Our metaphor-analytic methodology is informed by anthropological research methodology. The planned research projects will not be based on quantitative, psychometric assessments but rather on qualitative or semi-quantitative narrative analysis.

Our attention is focused primarily on two main topics: 'trauma and PTSD' and 'posttraumatic growth,' which is usually defined as positive psychological change that is experienced as a result of trauma or adversity. The metaphorical content of the posttraumatic *growth* concept is immediately evident: Growth is originally a biological term that connotes achieving magnitude, maturation and even progeny. These are high ambitions given to the sometimes very disturbed and weak states that survivors of extreme stress experience. Nevertheless, some affected individuals report phenomena that may be called 'posttraumatic growth' (PTG, Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Zoellner & Maercker, 2006). Our research group contributed to a cross-cultural reader on PTG that revealed similarities and differences across different world regions, e.g., non-uniform associations to cultural foundations in religiosity or spirituality (Wagner & Maercker, 2010b).

Carl Gustav Jung and His Basic Ideas on Meanings of Communication and Openness to Cultures

Psychological research can be and is most commonly conducted without reference to psychology's history and its important proponents. Thus, psychology and its subdisciplines are largely sciences with almost exclusively short-term memories (not like the humanities; Kagan, 2009). We believe that paying attention to the history of our discipline encourages creative impulses and broadens the scope of potential methods for solving hitherto unresolved problems such as the underrepresentation of non-western viewpoints in psychological research.

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), who lived and worked in Zurich, Switzerland, was a remarkably creative mind in psychology and psychotherapy. Strongly influenced by Sigmund Freud at the beginning of his professional career, Jung later developed various propositions and theorems of mental functioning that largely differed from Freud's approach. Two of these perspectives are relevant to the focus of the current paper: the semiotic perspective (i.e., symbolic representations and communications) and the ethnopsychological perspective (i.e., openness to non-western psychological phenomena). Both perspectives can be regarded as originally influenced by Jung, although he did not use the terms for these perspectives himself, and both perspectives have been used and further developed independently from his work through the current day.

The *semiotic perspective* in psychology deals with the multilayered meanings of communication acts, especially verbal material. It includes the study of signs, analogies, metaphors, myths, and symbolism and highlights the linguistic relativity of communication. Jung's psychology posits that "the fundamental 'language' of the psyche is not words, but images" (Abramovitch & Kirmayer, 2003, p. 159). From the beginning of his professional career as a psychiatrist treating psychotic patients, he tried to reconstruct the meaning behind the patients' verbalizations, e.g., paranoid ideas or hallucinatory images. He extended this approach to observing individuals who interacted with spirits they were convinced they had encountered. Jung did not question the subjective truth of individuals who believed in spirits or ghosts but instead analyzed the meaning and consequences of their imaginary communications (Papadopoulos, 2013). For example, one of Jung's female patients claimed to be Socrates' deputy. After carefully investigating the patient's personality and life history, Jung concluded that she meant 'I am unjustly accused like Socrates' (Jung & Jaffe, 1962, p. 147).

Lawrence Kirmayer, one of the most influential current experts on global mental health, referred to Jung when he suggested that studying the trinity of "myths, metaphors, and archetypes" enhances clinical interventions and psychotherapy (Kirmayer, 1993). He has argued that unravelling the meanings of communicative or narrative structures as first described by Jung would improve the effectiveness of any approach to healing and recovery. According to Kirmayer's (1993) line of argument, myths are narratives of conventional wisdom regarding life history. Such narratives provide a coherent story that confirms the universality of the patient's situation and suggests (through its plot) a way to resolve conflicts arising from the current situation. The term *archetypes* does not refer to preformed ideas or images as it does in Jung's original theory; instead it refers to body-related meanings.

In Kirmayer's (1993) model, metaphors are placed between myths and archetypes, linking communicative structures (myths) and body-related experiences (archetypes) through broader concepts that have a predominantly sensory-affective quality. He integrates the cognitive-linguistic notion of metaphors as 'thinking of one thing in terms of another' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) but extends this notion to personal choices of metaphors and self-awareness about such

choices. Furthermore, metaphors have a partial autonomy because the images are related to the "palpable realities of our bodies and our social beings" (Kirmayer, 1993, p. 187). The author concedes that "archetype" is "a word in some disrepute" (Kirmayer, 1993, p. 171), due to a lack of research on archetypes since Jung's time. He reformulates the concept of archetypes as the 'patterning' of more complex experiences by structures that are primarily part an individual's psychomotor system and that are shaped by culturally patterned environments; he fails, however, to give an example of this concept. Even if this contemporary re-formulation is not, in itself, convincing, the general recognition of semiotic varieties such as myths and metaphors still represents pioneering work by Jung.

Jung's perspective on semiotic varieties has been adopted even outside academic psychology. Gregory Bateson, a famous social scientist and anthropologist, referred to Jung in his model of a 'double bind' in psychopathology and more general communication paradoxes (Bateson, 1972), thereby laying the groundwork for the concept of meta-communication or multimodality in communication that is now widely acknowledged in education and media sciences (e.g., Kress, 2009). Furthermore, one popular textbook of film studies refers to Jung's ideas regarding the different layers involved in decoding and interpreting meaning in myths, metaphors and archetypes by interpreting images, plots, symbols and metaphors in movies (Bordwell, 2006).

Jung's *ethnopsychological perspective* has been critically appraised by Abramovitch and Kirmayer (2003) as well as Papadopoulos (2013). This perspective may originate in the personality feature of 'openness to new experiences' which has been the fifth factor of the Big Five model since the 1980s. The primary developer of this model, Robert McCrae (1994), credited Jung with "the first identification of openness to new experiences as a major dimension of personality" (p. 257). Jung himself exhibited this personal openness and fascination for 'new' cultures outside the European milieu while traveling through Egypt, East Africa, the southwest United States, and India. As Papadopoulos (2013) illustrates, however, Jung's travel reports and his more theoretical writings regarding non-Western psychological phenomena are full of zeitgeist terms of the age of colonization, e.g., describing indigenous people as 'primitives'. Jung was by no means unique in displaying such an ethnological interest and sentiment. He followed a trend, which was well established among European scholars studying the various characteristics of non-Western cultures. Wilhelm Wundt, one of the founders of academic or experimental psychology, wrote about the world views of different nations in the 1910s (e.g., Wundt, 1915). As Papadopoulos (2013) explains, the colonial zeitgeist was "expressed in unmistakably evaluative terms, i.e., referring to 'them' as 'primitives' either in a derogatory way (i.e., 'them' considered as being 'uncivilized', 'under-developed', etc.) or in an admiring / patronizing way ('them' considered as being pure and unspoiled, closer to nature and truth, as in the 'noble savage' idea)" (p. 3).

Jung's basic intention, nonetheless, was to study the compatibility of such non-European traditions through his own theoretical approach, thereby validating his own concepts and theories. He viewed his studies of other cultures as an opportunity to challenge his own understanding of one's psychological identity and human nature at large. Jung was particularly interested in indigenous people's beliefs and spiritual practices, which he regarded as being closer to the 'unconscious' and still uncontaminated by European logical thinking. In addition, he viewed indigenous people's psyche as more collective and less individualistic, thus anticipating future basic categories in cross-cultural psychology. Jung stressed the importance of the collective, e.g., by presuming that some forms of psychopathology are not rooted intrapsychically but rather that they develop when a person is cut off from his or her collective roots.

The notion of a 'collective unconsciousness' became central to his theories (Jung, 1969) and remains one of his most widely recognized concepts. A more mundane understanding of this concept related to current psychological paradigms translates it into 'collective structures of meaning', thus bridging the semiotic (meaning) and ethnopsychological (collective) perspectives in Jung's writings. An example of the collective structures of meaning is the personal/cultural value orientation that was described in detail above. Further examples are collective rituals, as well as religious, spiritual beliefs and practices. At this point, the topic of PTSD arises again because coping with or healing from trauma-related conditions in various cultures cannot be adequately understood without taking into account these collective structures of meaning (e.g., Hecker, Braitmayer, & van Duijl, 2015; Hinton & Kirmayer, 2013).

Jung's pioneering ethnopsychological perspective, however, implies one conceptual conflict. On the one hand, he remained an epistemological essentialist, trying to prove the global validity of his core concepts and theories as 'universals' (e.g., individuation and archetypes), but on the other hand, he exhibited psychological constructivism by analyzing a plurality of cultures, rituals, deities and—above all—levels of meaning. This ambivalence cannot be resolved ex post facto. Overall, he was a highly creative thinker who was ahead of his time and he deserves attention not only from laypersons who read his texts to learn about psychology but also from empirical researchers who aim to further extend psychological knowledge.

Outlook

This paper describes the somewhat unusual development of a new research project on trauma and posttraumatic growth with a (cross-) cultural psychology focus. Leaving quantitative psychology behind and moving toward a metaphor-analytic methodology presents new opportunities and risks. We are aware that quantitative methodologies and case descriptions are highly prevalent and useful in psychology and related disciplines such as global mental health, social work and mental health nursing. For instance, quantitative psychology has developed elaborate methods for effectively measuring invariance across cultures (Milfont & Fischer, 2010). However, we believe that additional perspectives from anthropology and ethnology—or the thoughts and principles developed by C. G. Jung—must be considered to adequately comprehend the as yet uncharted experiences of individuals in other cultures and of those individuals arriving in Europe from other cultures if we are to live together in dignity.

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